Chapter 5
Supporting Everyday Creativity in Ubiquitous Music Making

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ABSTRACT

The concept of everyday musical creativity is related to non-professional musical activities carried out in venues not intended for artistic practice. Everyday musical creativity demands technological support to provide access to musical resources by non-musicians and by musicians engaging in musical activities in domestic and public spaces. This chapter covers key aspects of the conceptual ubiquitous music framework and its methodological implications for the support of everyday creative activities. We discuss strategies to enhance music information value within the context of two sets of studies, the first set focusing on the development of an interaction metaphor and the second set dealing with the assessment of technological requirements to support creative musical activities in educational contexts. One of the implications of the methodological framework proposed by ubiquitous music studies is the expanded notion of musical information as a product of creative experience rather than as an abstract symbolic system.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the close relationships between ubiquitous music (UbiMus) research and everyday creativity. We discuss recent advances in general creativity studies, defining the domain of application of everyday creativity (Richards et al. 1988; Richards 2007) within the context of ubiquitous music research. We outline a set of experimental variables to be targeted by ecologically grounded design studies, framing two aspects that have not been considered in the musical interaction literature: relational properties and creative biases. Two case studies are discussed, illuminating new strategies for support of everyday musical activities.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0270-8.ch005
Research on everyday musical phenomena has been fostered by the emerging field of ubiquitous music (UbiMus) and by recent studies in ethnomusicology. UbiMus research focuses on the processes underlying everyday creative practices (Keller et al. 2014), while ethnomusicological approaches deal with creative product consumption (Kassabian 2004). Ethnomusicological research emphasizes usage of musical products outside of artistic venues. Complementarily, UbiMus targets support environments for creative practice in everyday settings. Hence UbiMus practice involves the production and manipulation of musical information for creative purposes. Ethnomusicological methods gather data on the usage of musical creative products, providing useful information about the end phase of the creativity chain. We focus on the ubiquitous music framework for the purpose of conceptualizing the study of musical information and the necessary support infrastructure in non-standard venues.

We cover the move toward everyday creative practices that started at the turn of the century, indicating the limitations of instrumentally oriented approaches, technically oriented methods in system design that exclude references to place-related factors, and the conception of creativity as the result of an isolated individual working in closed quarters. An important implication of this discussion is the critical appraisal of musical information as an abstract set of symbols. An alternative view – tuned to the needs of music making by untrained stakeholders and users lacking the support infrastructure of specialized venues – is grounded on the convergent proposals of sociocultural general creativity theory and ecologically inspired creative practices. Two key concepts are highlighted: relational properties and creative biases. We provide two examples of design implementations and experimental results targeting support for creative musical information handling in everyday settings.

Targeting Little-C Musical Creativity

Since the late 1990s, creative musical practices have incorporated resources that were absent from instrumentally oriented music making (Boulez 1986; Tanaka 2009) and from studio-centered approaches, including acousmatic (Wishart 2009) and soundscape composition (Truax 2002). There are at least four aspects of this move toward everyday creativity that demand a stronger theoretical framework:

Change of Focus from Creative Products to Processes

Conceptualizing music information as a static entity imposes serious limitations on the study of creative phenomena. New analytical and epistemological approaches are necessary to deal with music making as a creative experience (Keller and Ferneyhough 2004; Marsden 2012). Ubiquitous music (Keller et al. 2011a; Keller et al. 2014) and recent computational views (Bown et al. 2009; Bown 2014) on creative music making have converged on the concept of acoustic-instrumental paradigm or instrumentalism to characterize the premises of this view. Instrumentalism is implicit in the proposals that try to define musical by-products – scores (Clay & Freeman 2010), digital musical instruments (Machover & Chung 1989; Tanaka 2009) and instrumental ensembles such as the technological orchestras that use either stationary or portable devices (Cáceres et al. 2008) – as the targets of creative activity. Synchronous musical activities can hardly be represented by a single performance instance or by an isolated creative product. Laptop orchestras adopt a European nineteenth-century hierarchical approach to music making, using portable computers as orchestral components without changing the underlying social assumptions (see Small for a critical depiction of orchestral practices1). Another example of the acoustic-instrumental paradigm is provided by Orío’s (2006) approach to musical information processing. Orío tackles both